PRRC emerging trends

Published by the Princeton Religion Research Center

Vol. 11, No. 5

may 89

'Mainline' Church Membership Still Below Level of 1960's, 1970's

PRINCETON, N.J. — The percentage of adults who state a preference for a "mainline" Protestant denomination continues to fall below the levels recorded in the 1960's and mid-1970's, although the declines have levelled off in the last few years.

In the latest (1988) audit, based on interviews with 15,460 adults nationwide, 10% chose a Methodist church, 6% Lutheran, 4% Presbyterian, and 2% Episcopalian.

The percentage of those stating a preference for a Baptist church has shown little change since 1967, when the audit was started.

It is important to bear in mind that these annual Gallup audits report *preference*, not *membership*.

Here are the latest findings, based on denominations receiving 2% or more in terms of preference:

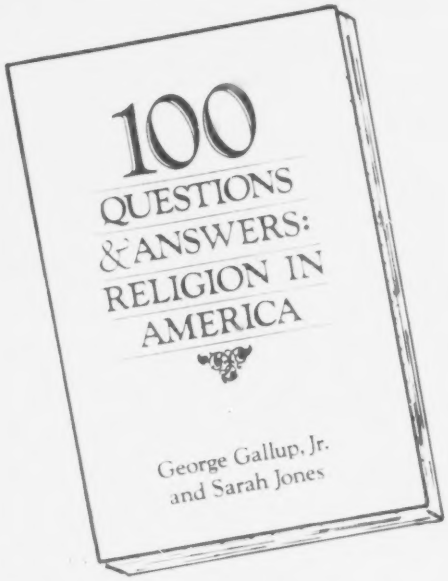
Preferences for Major Protestant Denominations (1988)

	% of all adults
Baptist	20
Methodist	10
Lutheran	6
Presbyterian	4
Episcopalian	2
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	2
United Church of Christ (or Congregationalist or Evangelical and Reformed	2

Here is the long-term trend (available for only four major Protestant groupings):

Protestant Church Preferences

	Baptist %	Methodist %	Lutheran %	Presbyterian %	Episcopalian %
1988	20	10	6	4	2
1987	20	9	6	3	2
1986	20	9	5	2	2
1985	20	10	6	2	2
1984	20	9	7	2	3
1983	21	10	7	3	2
1982	19	10	6	4	2
1981	19	10	6	4	2
1980	19	10	6	4	2
1979	19	11	6	4	2
1978	19	11	6	4	2
1976	21	11	7	5	3
1975	20	11	7	5	3
1974	21	14	7	6	3
1969	20	14	7	6	3
1967	21	14	7	6	3



New from PRRC

A Convenient Source for Key Survey Facts About Religion

100 Questions and Answers: Religion In America

by

George Gallup, Jr. and Sarah Jones

The Princeton Religion Research Center is pleased to announce the publication of *100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America*, a 253-page book that fills the need for a convenient source of vital and up-to-date survey findings on religion.

This book, which represents the distillation of many recent Gallup surveys, deals in depth with each of the 100 topics — analysis by key demographic groups, trends, background information, and charts. Sections include religious belief and ethics, religion and politics, religious experience, and spiritual development and commitment.

Why do most Americans believe in God, in miracles, eternal judgment, and moral absolutes? And why are fewer on membership rolls of churches and synagogues? Some of the latest and most revealing Gallup religion polls show public opinion of organized religion is changing, but huge majorities still cling to basic teachings of the biblical tradition. Religious faith in this country today may be more a matter of conscience than shared experience. What does the future hold for this nation of believers? Based on a vast range of questions put to the U.S. public, this book takes a hard look at religion in America from the ground up.

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Teens Maintain Religious Beliefs

The vast majority of America's teens continue to believe in God or in a universal spirit, according to the latest Gallup Youth Survey.

A majority of the surveyed teens also hold a belief in a personal God who observes and judges people and rewards or punishes them in a life after death. Few teens, however, express belief in reincarnation or the rebirth of the soul in a new body after death.

Belief in God or a universal spirit is held by 95 percent of teens, statistically unchanged since 1985, when 96 percent expressed similar beliefs. Nearly all teens who attend church regularly (99 percent) say they believe in God, compared with 89 percent of those who do not attend regularly.

About three teens in four (77 percent) believe their God is a personal God who observes their actions and who rewards or punishes them for their deeds. The proportion now holding this belief is about the same as in 1985 (75 percent).

Regular church-attenders are more likely than those who do not attend regularly to believe there is a personal God, by a margin of 84 percent to 75 percent. Faith in a God who judges their actions also is higher among Protestant teens (83 percent) than among Catholics (76 percent).

The belief in a life after death is held by two teens in three (65 percent), virtually unchanged from 1985, when 66 percent expressed a similar opinion. Interestingly, over the years, young men have been more likely than young women to believe in an afterlife. Currently, they are more apt than young women to hold this view, by a margin of 70 percent to 60 percent.

Although teens in the South show higher-then-average belief in God (98 percent) or a personal God (84 percent), they are less likely (60 percent) than from other regions (67 percent) to believe in a life after death.

The concept of reincarnation or the rebirth of the soul in a new body after death is a basic belief in some Eastern religions, but is accepted by only three teens in 10 (31 percent). Belief in reincarnation is strongest among teens who are doing only average or below-average work in school (39 percent), compared with just 25 percent of those who say they are above-average students.

Overall, belief in reincarnation has increased a statistically insignificant 2 percentage points since 1985, when 29 percent of teens expressed faith in the concept.

Here is how the questions were asked:

Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?

Do you believe that this God or universal spirit observes your actions and rewards or punishes you for them?

Do you believe in life after death?

Do you believe in reincarnation, that is, rebirth of the soul in a new body after death.

The findings reported today are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 503 teen-agers, 13 through 17, conducted March 1-15, 1989.

Religious Beliefs

	God %	Personal God %	Life after death %	Reincarnation %
NATIONAL	95	77	65	31
Male	93	76	70	32
Female	97	80	60	10
Ages 13 to 15	95	77	64	32
Ages 16 to 17	95	77	67	29
Above-average students	94	76	63	25
Average or below	97	78	67	39
Protestant	98	83	64	28
Catholic	99	76	64	32
Attend church regularly	99	84	67	29
Do not attend regularly	89	75	63	32
East	93	72	68	36
Midwest	95	78	64	26
South	98	84	60	30
West	92	76	70	30

Many Teens Believe Shoplifting Is Common

Many teens believe shoplifting among fellow students is at least fairly common, and some admit to having shoplifted themselves, according to the latest Gallup Youth Survey.

In addition, most teens believe that young people shoplift for "kicks" more so than out of economic need.

Overall, 49 percent of teens think shoplifting is fairly common among students at their school, and an additional 12 percent believe it is very common. Disagreeing are 38 percent, who say shoplifting is not at all common.

Four teens in five (79 percent) believe that most young people who shoplift do so mainly for the thrill, while only 17 percent believe teens shoplift because they need the money.

Over time, teens have maintained the view that most shoplifting is done for kicks: Between 1981 and 1989, a constant 17-18 percent of teens have stated the belief that shoplifting has been done of economic necessity.

Only 18 percent of teens admit that they have ever shoplifted. This represents a slight rise in reported shoplifting since 1985, when only 15 percent of teens admitted to the practice, when 30 percent said they had been shoplifters.

Currently, young men are more likely than young women to report they have ever shoplifted, by a margin of 22 percent to 13 percent. Young women (15 percent) are more likely than young men (10 percent) to believe that shoplifting is very common among their contemporaries.

By age, there is only a slight rise in reported shoplifting between those who are 13 to 15 years of age (16 percent) and teens who are 16 or older (20 percent).

Regionally, the West has the dubious distinction of the highest incidence of teen shoplifting (29 percent) when compared with other regions (15 percent).

Suburban teens (21 percent) are more likely than those in big cities (15 percent) or rural areas (16 percent) to report they have ever shoplifted.

Education, economic background, and religious training may all play some part in determining which teens are most likely to shoplift. Least likely to say they have shoplifted are teens doing above-average work at school (13 percent), those from white-collar family backgrounds, (14 percent), and those who attend church regularly (14 percent).

Conversely, reports of shoplifting are higher than average among students who say their school work is only average or below average (24 percent), those who come from blue-collar households (24 percent), and those who are not regular church-attenders (24 percent).

Most likely to report that shoplifting is very common among their fellow students are teens from the West (16 percent) and academic underachievers (15 percent).

Although Western teens are the most likely to report shoplifting by both themselves and others, they are the least likely to believe it is done because they need the money (13 percent).

Here is how the questions were asked:

How common is shoplifting among students at your school? Would you say it is very common, fairly common, not at all common?

Do you feel that most young people who shoplift do so because they need the money or because of the "kicks" involved?

Have you ever shoplifted an item from a store?

The findings reported today are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 503 teenagers, 13 hrough 17, conducted March 1-15, 1989.

Shoplifting Profile

	Ever shoplifted %	Say shoplifting very common %
NATIONAL	18	12
Male	22	10
Female	13	15
Ages 13 to 15	16	12
Ages 16 to 17	20	13
Above-average students	13	11
Average and below	24	15
White-collar family background	14	14
Blue-collar family background	24	11
East	14	13
Midwest	18	10
South	13	11
West	19	16
Central cities	16	13
Suburbs	21	11
Non-metropolitan areas	16	13
Attend church regularly	14	10
Do not attend regularly	24	16

Most College Students Profess Christian Beliefs

Few college students now classify themselves as agnostics or atheists (6%), and even fewer are adherents of Islam, eastern religions, or the "new age" philosophy (4%). Most, instead, state a Protestant denomination (48%), Roman Catholicism (29%), of Judaism (2%) as their religious preference.

Four students in 10 (42%) say religion is "very important in their lives," while an additional 37% say it is somewhat important to them. Disagreeing are 20% of the undergraduates who do not consider religion very important in their lives.

Over half of the students (55%) attended religious services at least once in the 30-day period preceding the interview. Over one-third of the students (37%) say they read the Bible at least monthly. But half of the nation's college students say they rarely or never read the Bible.

About one student in four (23%) would describe himself as a "born again" or evangelical Christian. Protestant (43%) college students are much more likely than Catholics to describe themselves as born-again Christians.

	Total %	Protestant %	Catholic %
Consider religion to be very important	42	52	39
Attended religious services in last 30 days	55	65	60
Describe self as born-again or evangelical Christian	23	43	4
Read Bible at least weekly	24	34	15

But Religion Often Has Little Impact Upon Sexual Behavior

Many students may be attending religious services, reading the Bible regularly, and consider religion to be an influence in their lives, but for many this has not diminished their sexual activity or the expression of liberal attitudes towards sex.

Among college women, for example, few see a life style for themselves in which they will be content to stay home and be a faithful housewife devoted totally to raising children. Instead, two in three fully expect to combine marriage, children, **and** a full-time career.

Seven students in ten (69%) do not feel it is wrong for a man and woman to have sexual relations before marriage. A majority (56%) approves of trial marriages. If a marriage does not work out, 69% approve of divorce in cases of incompatibility.

But once a couple is married, 92% of the students say it is very important for a couple to have sexual relations only with each other.

Half of the students (51%) approve of the Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade decision. Seeking its repeal are 37% of the college students, while 12% are undecided on the issue.

Nine percent of the college women interviewed reported they themselves have had abortions. Among the college men interviewed, 15% believe they have had sexual partners who had had abortions.

One college student in four (26%) reports having sexual intercourse regularly, and occasional sexual relations are reported by 24% of the students. Half of the students have had more than one sexual partner in their lives, including 24% who say they have had five or more partners. Additionally, 23% say they have had only one sexual partner. One student in four (26%), however, has yet to have any sexual partners.

Overall, 4% of the college students say they are now or have in the past been treated for a sexually transmitted disease.

Nine students in 10 (90%) say they are heterosexual. Homosexuality or bisexuality is reported by 3% of the students, while 4% currently are undecided about their sexual identities.

In general, students who are active in the Church and identify themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians, tend to be on the conservative side of attitudes and behavior concerning sexuality. But, even though the incidence may be lower, they are by no means immune to even such problems as being the victims of sexually transmitted diseases or having had abortions.

These and other findings on the religious habits and sexual practices were obtained from a survey conducted among 539 college undergraduate students randomly sampled from 100 campuses across the nation in March 1989. The survey was conducted by The Gallup Organization, and was commissioned by the Christian Broadcasting Network. (For further information about the survey contact Frankie, Abourjilie, Vice President for Public Relations, Christian Broadcasting Network, CBN Center, Virginia Beach, VA 23463.)

PRRC To Offer Presentation Based On Results of Unchurched American Study

Princeton, N.J. — Stating that the results of the recently completed "Unchurched American" survey needed to have widespread availability to clergy and other church workers, George Gallup, Jr., Executive Director of the Princeton Religion Research Center, announced that the PRRC will offer consultation that will help individual churches and other religious organizations make practical use of the survey findings.

The presentation entitled, "Reaching the Unchurched American," includes an overview of the study, comparisons between the 1988 and 1978 surveys, and possible steps to reach the unchurched.

For more information on how you can schedule a presentation for your church, denomination, or religious organization, please write:

Russell D. Bredholt
Princeton Religion Research Center
P.O. Box 389
Princeton, New Jersey 08542

EMERGING TRENDS is published monthly except July and August by the PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER. The Center, founded in 1977, is an inter-faith non-denominational research organization with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. The PRRC specializes in creative, actionable research, utilizing the worldwide attitudinal and behavioral facilities of Gallup International. The purpose of the PRRC is to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the U.S. and abroad and to explore ways this information can enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth. A one-year subscription can be obtained for $30.00. Inquire: **Publications Department, P.O. Box 310, 53 Bank Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542 (Telephone 609/924-9600). PLEASE NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGE.**

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P.O. Box 310
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